

And Now a Word from Our Sponsor.....

Arizona in December.

The crescent desert moon hangs like a sickle in the purple sky as the evening star peeks around the ragged edges of the dying sunset.

I went into the desert, to hear U2 and to get away from Los Angeles. It was a respite from the worries of the market and the pressures of the city. It moved me to pick my pen and speak to all of you out there, again.

I looked around the stadium at the concert and saw 50,000 people from around the country, brought together for two days of optimistic pessimism about life, love and the state of the world today. Ireland, El Salvador, assassination, despair.....and in the midst of it all, hope. For a new age, or just a better world. A temporary unity of thought and emotion. And, looking around, I thought of our "audience" for the various Renegade books. (I would guess we reach about 50,000 people each month) How diverse we all are, and yet we are brought together each month when we pick up the same stories and share our collective emotions in the words and pictures.

Sometimes it feels as if there is no hope, no way out of despair, and I know we have all felt these emotions. But the gift of communication allows all of us to see that we are not alone in our trapped emotions. And in sharing the problems, we share the solutions. I may not be able to do much about the state of the world, the bombings in Ireland, the fear and pain brought by american intervention in South America, the careless murders in all cities where handguns are bought casually ; but I can talk about my fears and perhaps hope that some awareness creeps in. I live in a country where, until I decide to get US citizenship, I cannot vote. I feel helpless, until I remember that I have a forum.

In the desert, all looks barren to the casual observer. But in reality, the options for life are boundless, simply well hidden. Perhaps we can all learn to take our options for life out of hiding, dust them off and learn to use them for the betterment of our planet.

With the New Year, I wish you all the pleasure of seeing your hopes fulfilled and your spiritual/emotional quests answered.

I'll see you again in the next month or so.

Deni

TREE

Published twelve times a year by Renegade Press, 2705 E. 7th Street, Long Beach, CA. 90804. MS. TREE is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed herein are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is coincidental. All contents © 1988 Max Collins and Terry Beatty. Any inquiries regarding use of the characters, images, or situations depicted should be addressed to Deni Loubert. No unauthorized reproduction allowed except for review or other journalistic purposes. Advertising rates furnished on request. Printed in Canada by Preney Print & Litho. Inc., Windsor, Ontario.

NO. 44

FEBRUARY 1988

Deni Loubert
Publisher

Jennifer Grasberger
Assistant to the Publisher

Peter Avanzino
Circulation

Barb Collins
Managing Editor

Distributors:

Bud Plant Inc.
Diamond Comics
Comics Unltd. Ltd
Capital City Dist.
Styx Comic Service
Now and Then Books
Andromeda Pub.
Second Genesis
Titan Dist.

Renegade Logo Design by Dave Roman

PRINTED IN CANADA

MAX COLLINS and
TERRY BEATTY'S

ISSN 0826-2586

44
FEB

200
IN U.S.
275
CANADA

Ms. TREE™

Renegade
Press



JOHNNY
DYNAMITE™



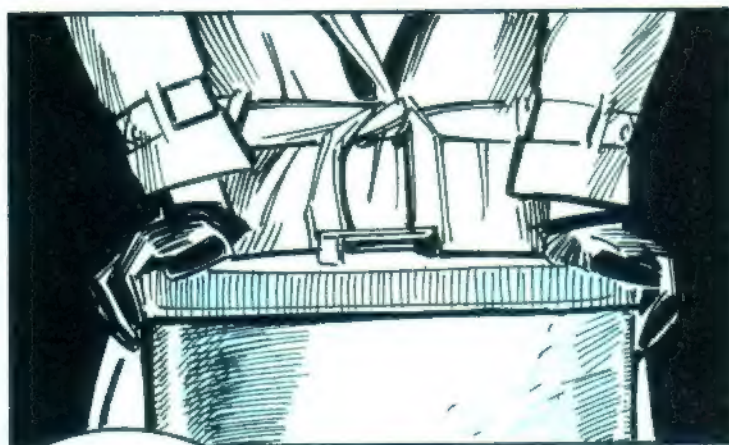
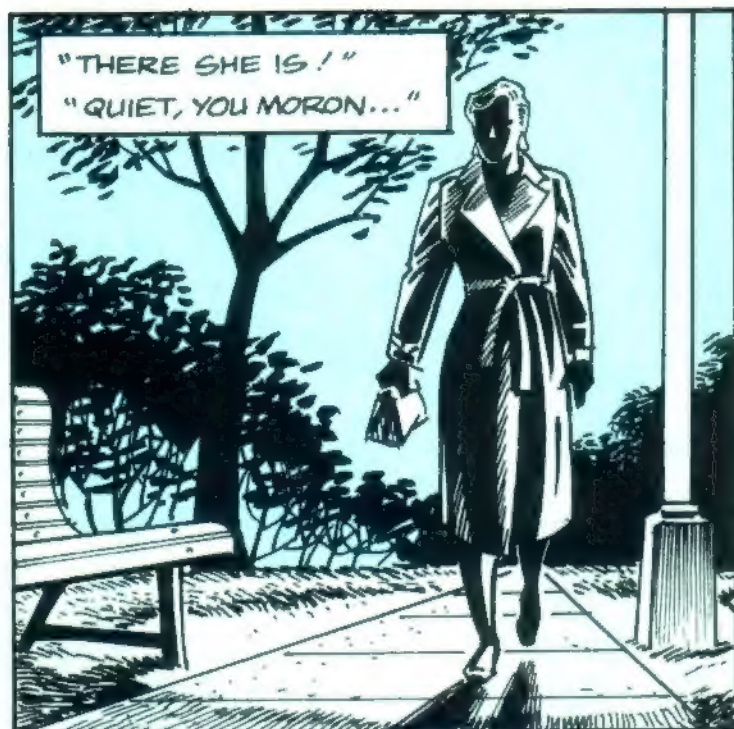
Ms. TREE "COMING OF RAGE"

CHAPTER FOUR: VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCE



BY MAX COLLINS, TERRY BEATTY AND GARY KATO







HE'S
OUT... AND
I'M GOING TO
GET UP -

MIKE...

I'M GOING
TO GET **BEHIND**
YOU... SEE IF
YOU CAN UNTIE
MY **ROPE**...





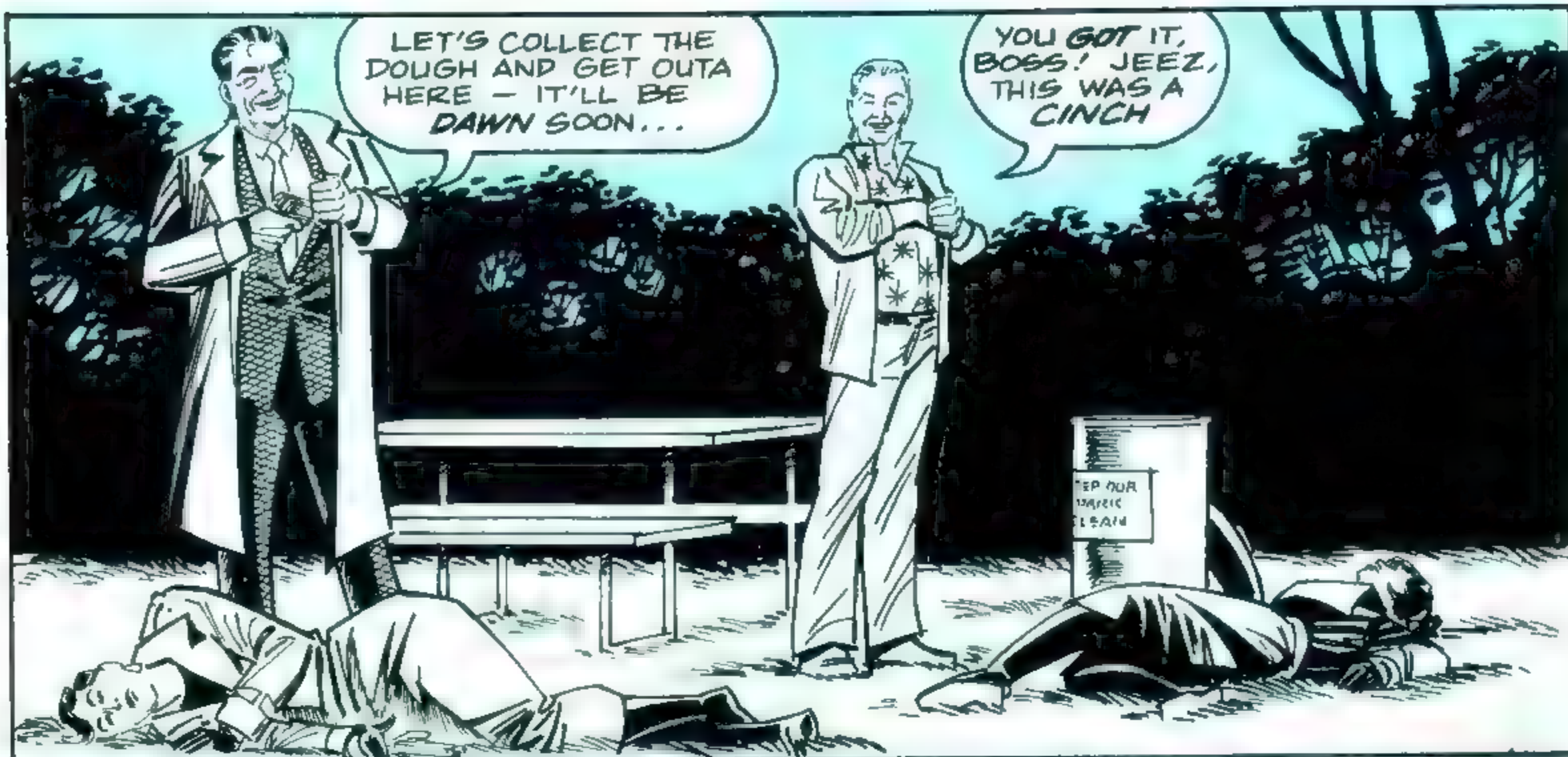


"I DON'T THINK SO - I DON'T THINK EITHER OF OUR MOTHERS WOULD APPRECIATE THAT -"



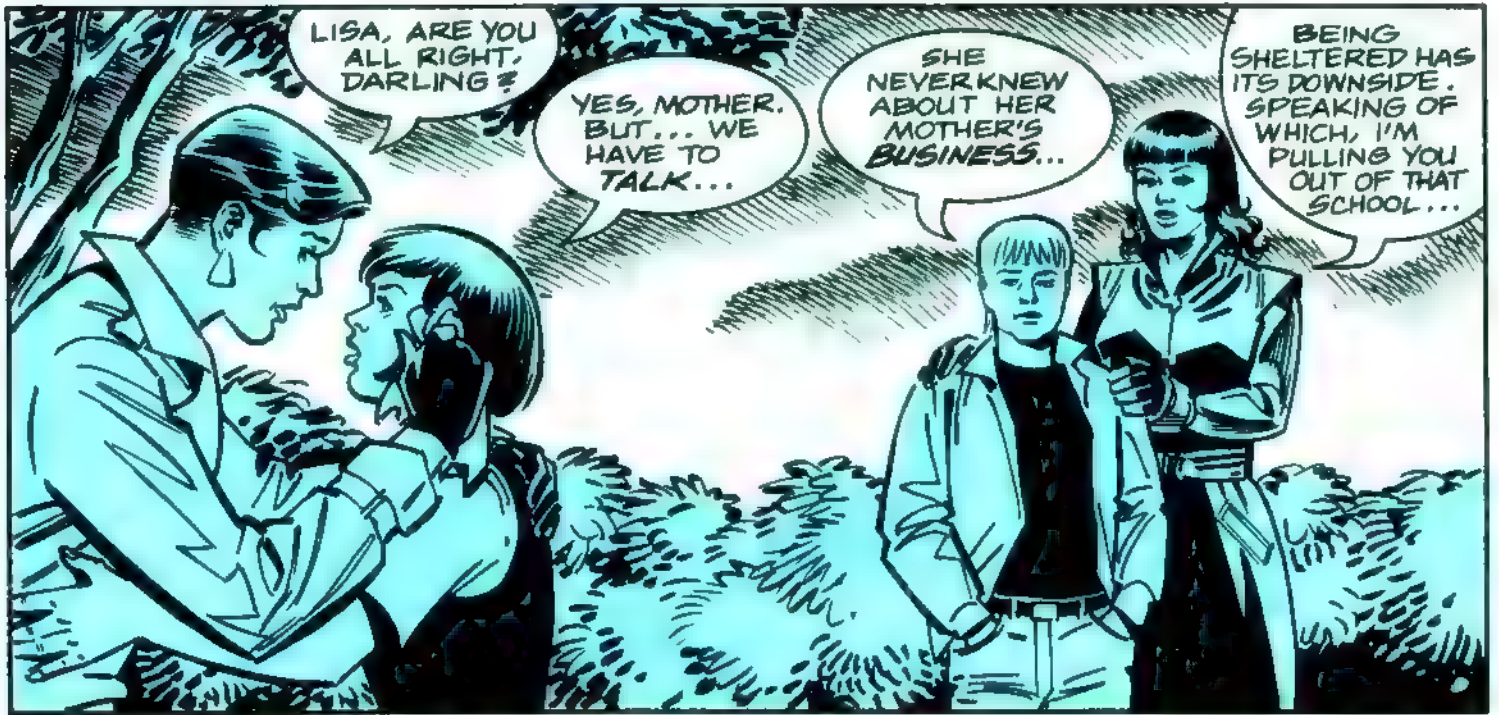










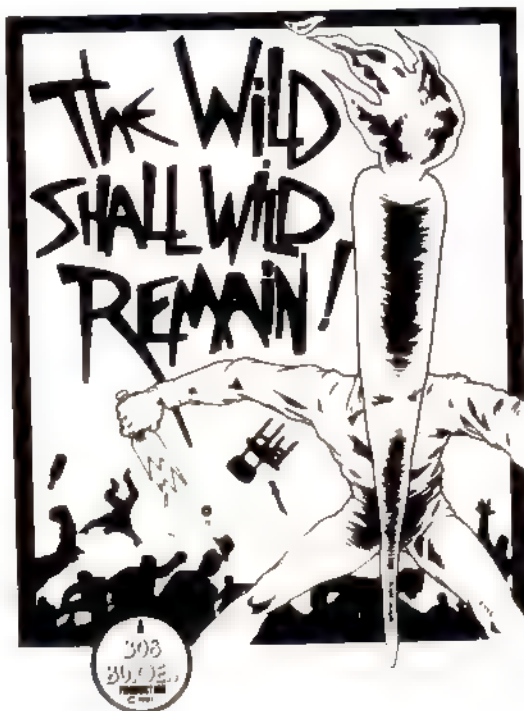


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This listing is just a small sample of the many items in the mystery, pulps, science fiction and fantasy fields we list in our monthly catalog. A copy is sent free with any order or send .50 for the latest listing.

MAX ALLAN COLLINS NOVELS (AND STORIES)

*NEON MIRAGE - the new Nate Heller hardcover from St. Martin's. Heller, Bugsy Siegel and Virginia Hill collide in 1947 Vegas! Kirkus says: "Collins breaks out a really good one, knocking over the hardboiled competition (Parker and Leonard for sure, maybe even Puzo) with a one-two punch: a feisty storyline told bittersweet and wry...unputdownable." Many b & w period photos. Bookplate signed by Collins laid in...\$18.95.

*MALLORY, TOR paperback: just published: KILL YOUR DARLINGS, \$3.95; also: THE BABY BLUE RIP-OFF, \$2.95.

SPREE - TOR HC, first Nolan novel in six years. Ex-thief Nolan (and Jon) must help the revenge-happy Comforts loot a shopping mall, or Nolan's girl friend Sherry will die! Recommended. 311 pages. Bookplate signed by Max Allan Collins laid in...\$15.95.

PRIMARY TARGET - Foul Play Press HC, the first Quarry novel in ten years! When he refuses to become involved in the assassination of a Presidential candidate, Quarry becomes an immediate loose end. Recommended. Bookplate signed by Max Allan Collins laid in.....\$15.95.

BLACK LIZARD ANTHOLOGY OF CRIME FICTION - trade paperback. Features a new Nate Heller short story, "Scrap," plus Collins- edited/revised Jim Thompson novella. Also Gorman, Ellison, Pronzini. Recommended. \$8.95.

HARDBOILED - Spring '87 issue. Features "Enter Nolan," the previously unpublished (circa '68) first Nolan story. Future collector's item. \$3.

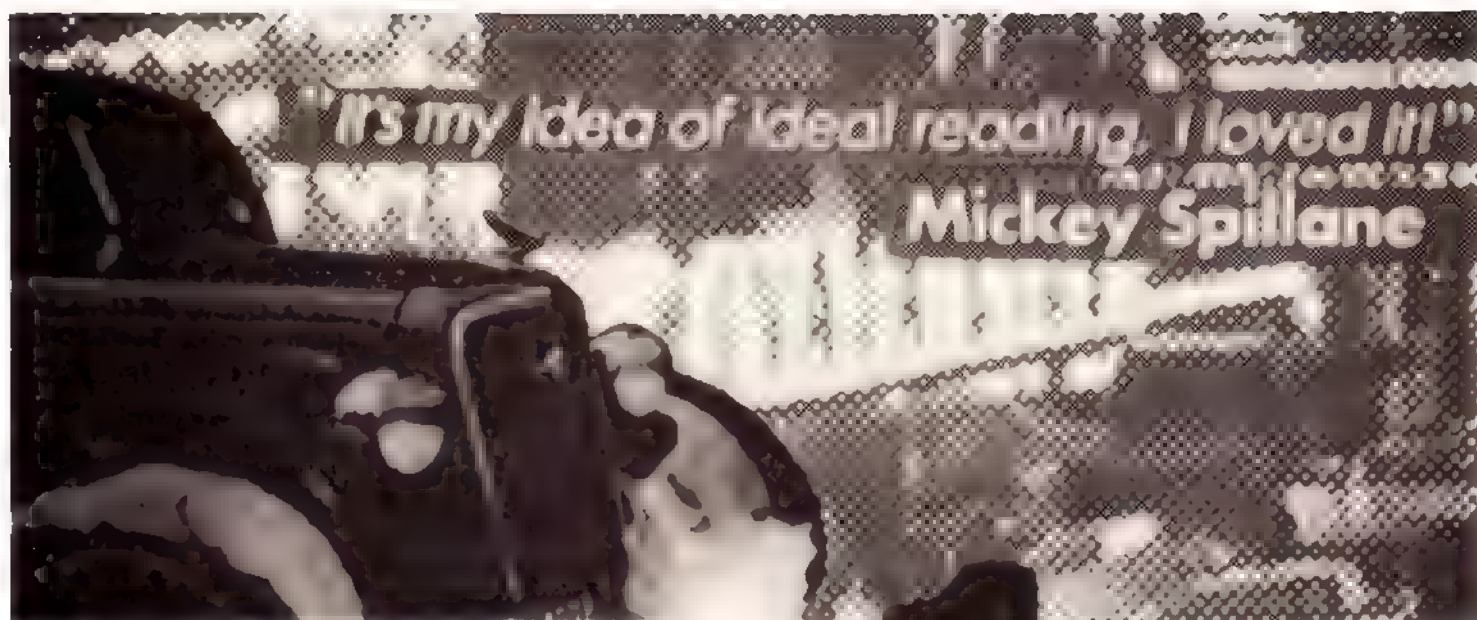
THE DARK CITY - Bantam paperback. Eliot Ness in Cleveland ... \$3.50.

OTHER NEW BOOKS:

REVENGE OF THE HOUND - HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES sequel by Michael Hardwick, recapturing the flavor of the original Holmes tales. HC, \$17.95.

THE OFFICIAL SHERLOCK HOLMES TRIVIA BOOK - by Richard Ryan; trade paperbound. 205 pages. Probably best book of its kind. \$7.95.

SHELLSHOCK - Richard S. Prather. New Shell Scott book! Good funny hardboiled mystery adventure by a master. TOR HC, \$16.95.



"It's my idea of ideal reading. I loved it!"

Mickey Spillane

NEON MIRAGE

A Novel by

MAX ALLAN COLLINS


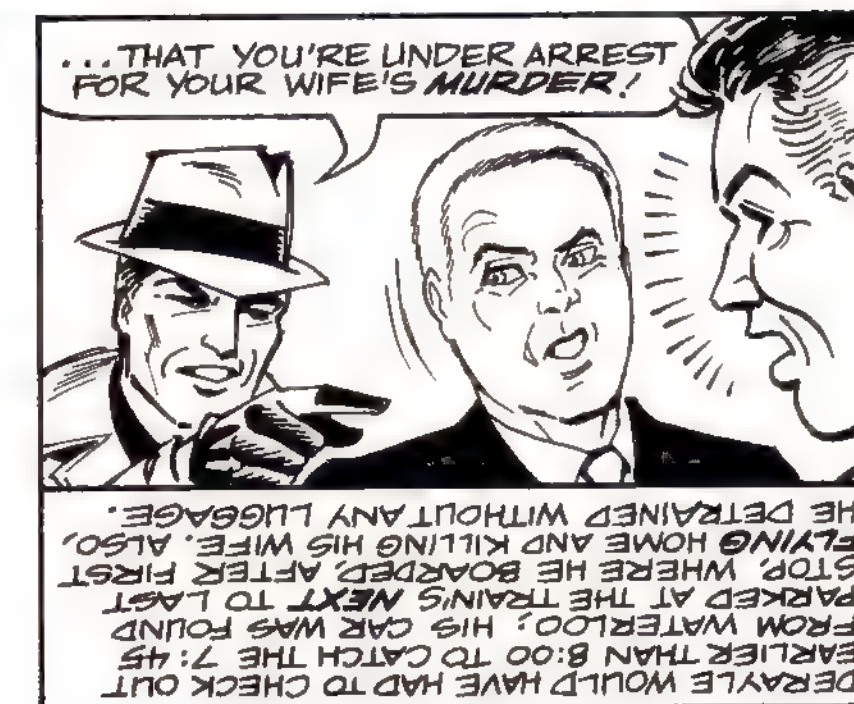
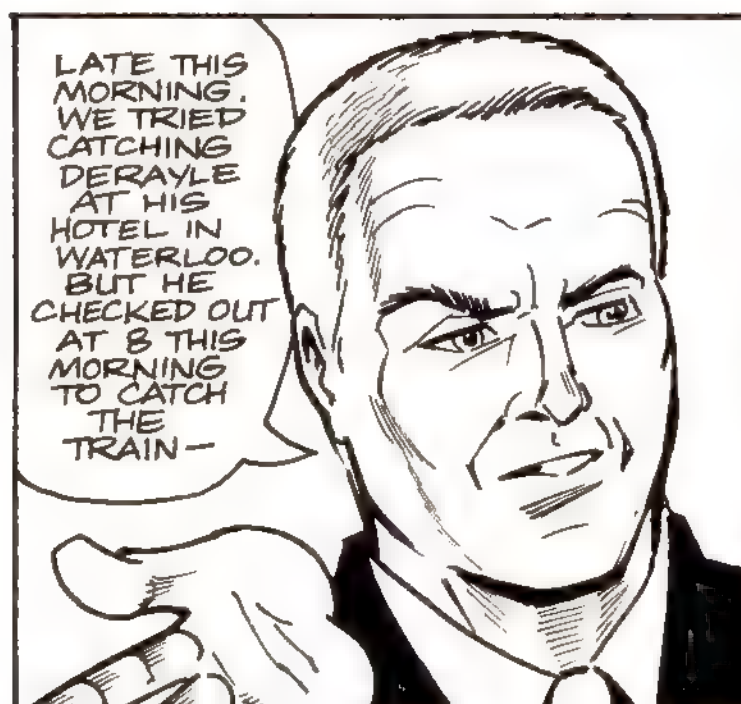
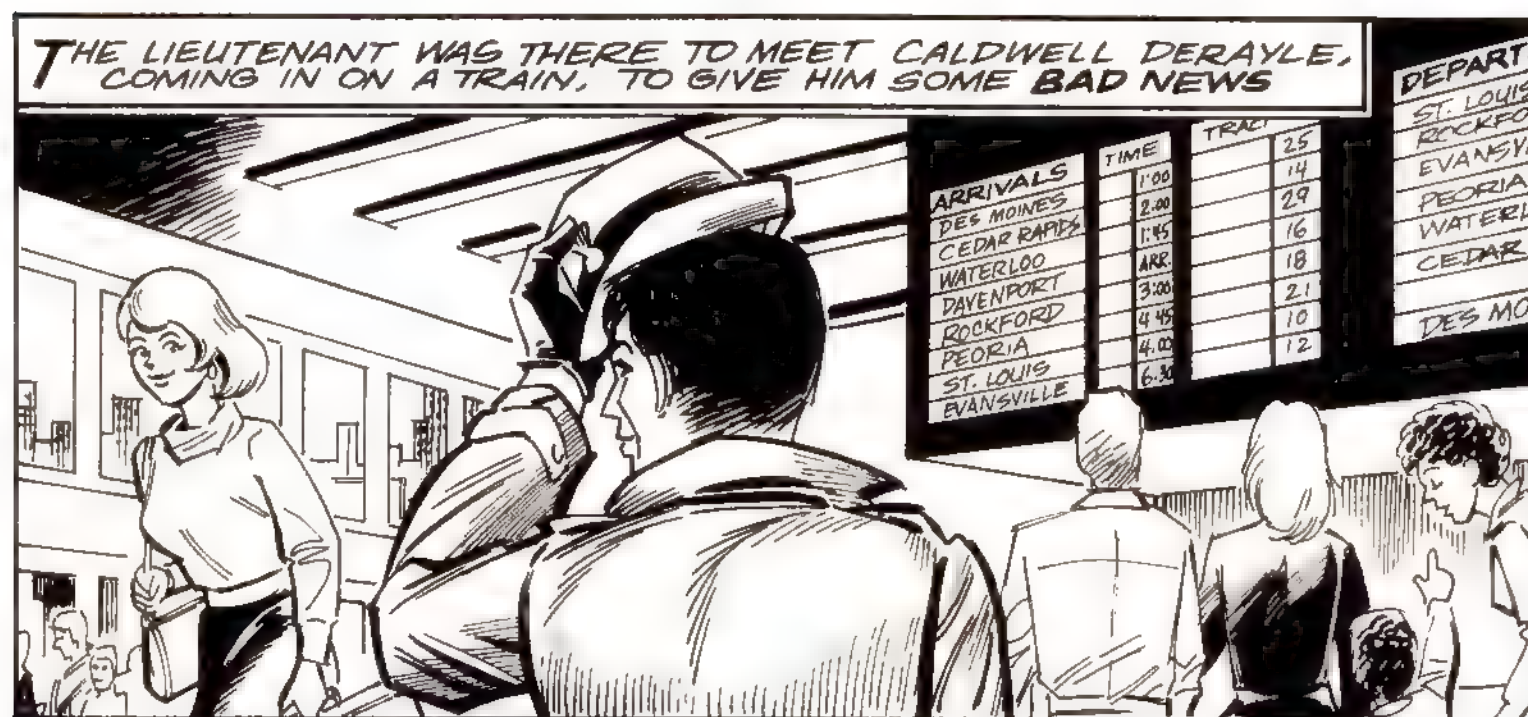
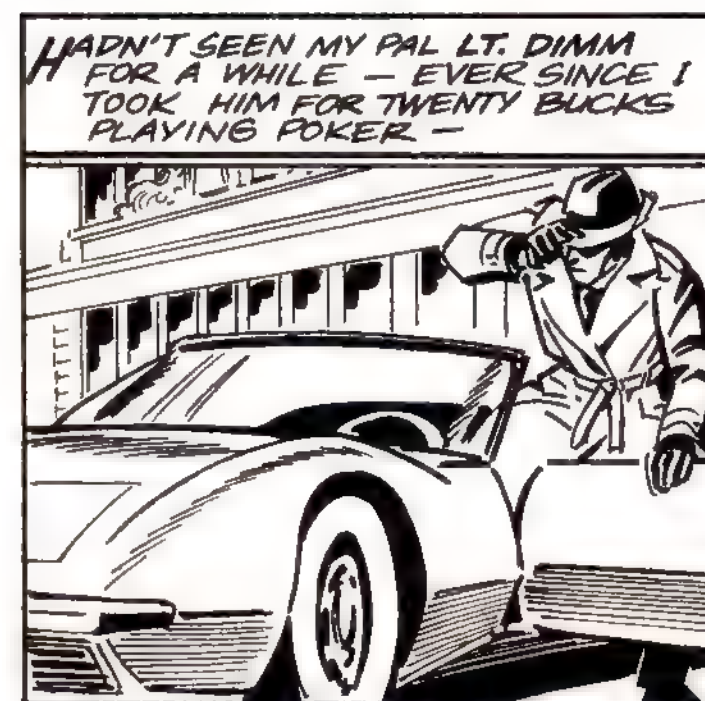
ON SALE NOW

THE MIKE MIST

MINUTE MIST-ERIES

MAX & BARB COLLINS and GARY KATO

FEAR OF FRYING

JOHNNY DYNAMITE



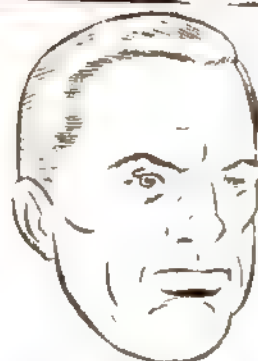
*SHE WAS DYING, EVEN AS I
TOOK HER IN MY ARMS AND
SHE WAS FRIGHTENED! SHE
SAID, "I'M AFRAID TO DIE,
JOHNNY!"*

**DEATH
IS SO
LONELY**

*MURIEL
WAUGH*



LAURIE



MCKENDRY



CAVANAUGH

IT WAS MY OWN FAULT BECAUSE I'D LEFT MY DOOR UNLOCKED WHEN I TOOK JUDY KANE TO EAT. I RETURNED TO FINISH SOME PAPER WORK WHEN...

OWW!



I ROLLED WITH THE HIT THAT THUNDERED ACROSS MY FACE. I HAD NO TIME TO THINK. ALL I COULD DO WAS LASH OUT AT THE HULKING SHAPES BEFORE ME.



I GOT LUCKY AND SENT BOTH MUSCLE BOY SPRAWLING. I DIDN'T WASTE ANY TIME EMPTYING MY SHOULDER SLING AND LEVELING THE .45 IN THEIR DIRECTION.



HOLD IT, DYNAMITE! JEEZ, DON'T FIRE THAT ROD!

CONVINCE ME, BUD. YOU'VE GOT TEN SECONDS.



TEN SECONDS? YOU MEAN YOU'D ACTUALLY... JEEZ! OKAY. OKAY! CALL CHET MCKENDRY! HE'LL PUT YA STRAIGHT! CALL HIM!

MCKENDRY? YOU CRUDS DON'T BELONG IN THE SAME BREATH WITH HIM!



I EXPECTED THE PHONE TO BE BOOBY-TRAPPED AND KNOCKED IT OFF ITS CRADLE WITH THE WINDOW POLE. NOTHING BLEW UP, SO I DIALED 'OPERATOR' AND SHE REACHED MCKENDRY AT HIS OFFICE.

...WHEN CAN I SEE YOU, DYNAMITE? TO EXPLAIN THE WHOLE THING TO YOU.

RIGHT AWAY, AND YOU'D BETTER BE GOOD!



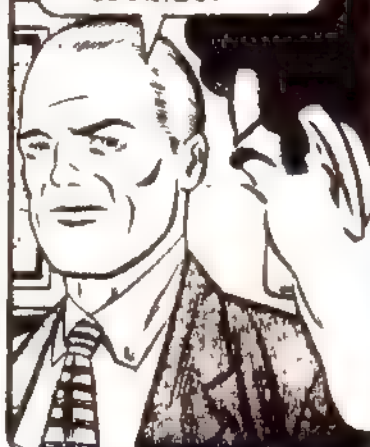
I KICKED THE MUSCLE BOYS OUT OF THE OFFICE AND HOPPED A CAB TO MCKENDRY'S PLACE. I WAS STILL PLENTY BOILING WHEN I SAW HIM...

YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE A HERO IN THIS TOWN, MCKENDRY. "CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL IN KOREA AND ALL" BUT YOU TALK LIKE A HEEL AND I DON'T LIKE YOUR COMPANY.

TAKE A CHAIR, DYNAMITE.



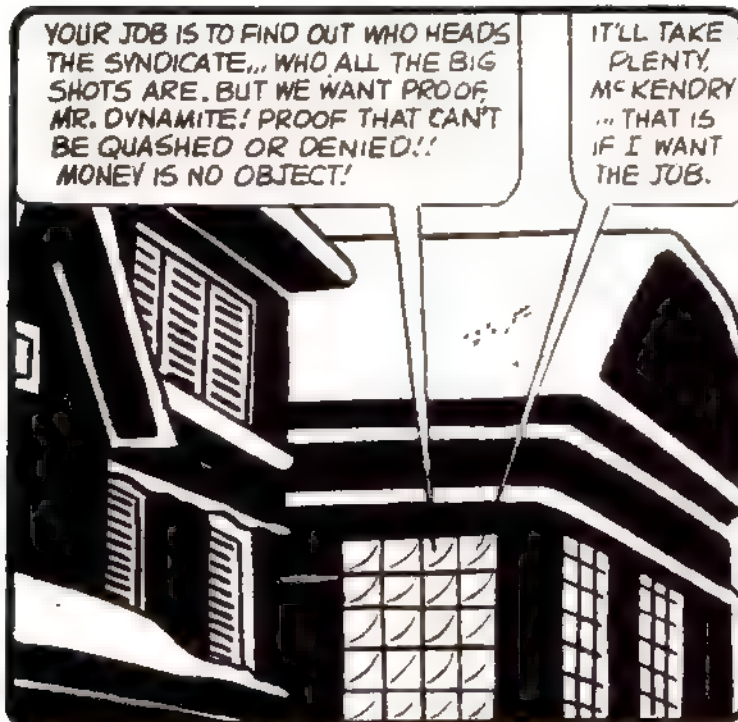
THOSE MEN... GRILLO AND AMES... THEY WERE TRYING TO SEE IF YOU COULD TAKE IT AND DISH IT OUT. I MIGHT SAY YOU LIVED UP TO YOUR REPUTATION. THEY WERE TOUGH COOKIES.



SPIT IT OUT, MCKENDRY. YOU HAVEN'T TOLD ME A THING YET.

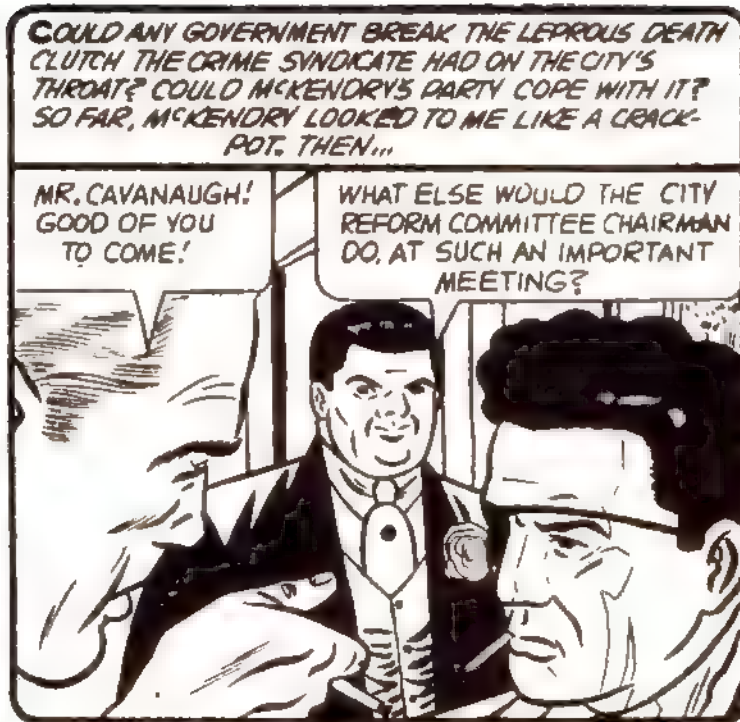
I'M SORRY FOR THE ROUGH STUFF, DYNAMITE. BUT THERE'S TOO MUCH AT STAKE TO TAKE CHANCES. WE NEED EVIDENCE THAT WILL ELECT A NEW REFORM GOVERNMENT WITH ME AS MAYOR. OUR PLATFORM CALLS FOR CRUSHING THE CRIME SYNDICATE!





YOUR JOB IS TO FIND OUT WHO HEADS THE SYNDICATE... WHO ALL THE BIG SHOTS ARE. BUT WE WANT PROOF, MR. DYNAMITE! PROOF THAT CAN'T BE QUASHED OR DENIED!! MONEY IS NO OBJECT!

IT'LL TAKE PLENTY, MCKENDRY... THAT IS IF I WANT THE JOB.



MR. CAVANAUGH! GOOD OF YOU TO COME!

WHAT ELSE WOULD THE CITY REFORM COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN DO, AT SUCH AN IMPORTANT MEETING?

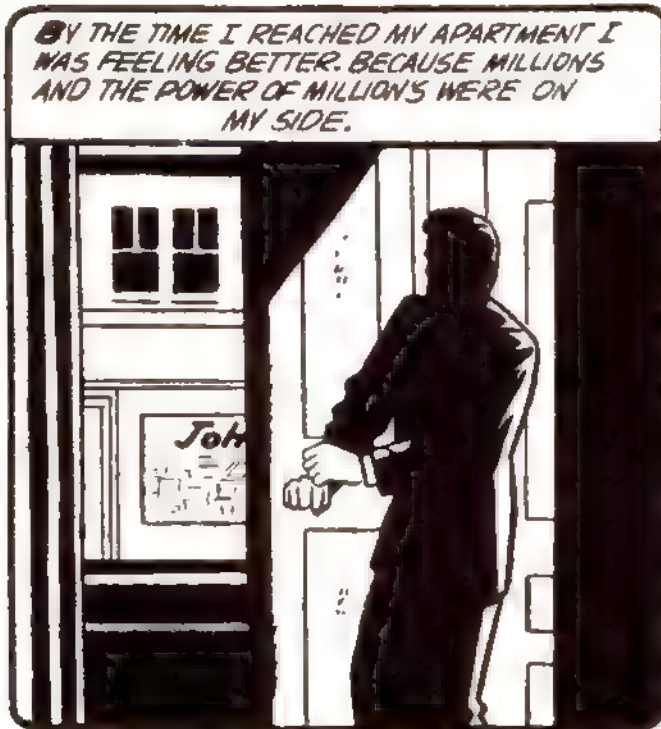
COULD ANY GOVERNMENT BREAK THE LEPROUS DEATH CLUTCH THE CRIME SYNDICATE HAD ON THE CITY'S THROAT? COULD MCKENDRY'S PARTY COPE WITH IT? SO FAR, MCKENDRY LOOKED TO ME LIKE A CRACKPOT. THEN...



IT MADE THINGS LOOK DIFFERENT WITH CAVANAUGH BEHIND THE REFORM MOVE. RAYMOND CAVANAUGH WAS BIG-BUSINESS... MULTI-MILLION'S BIG... WITH POWER. IF HE COULD FIGHT THE SYNDICATE... I WAS SORE ABOUT THE ROUGHHOUSE, BUT... WELL, BUSINESS WAS BUSINESS.

WE CAN BE AS TOUGH AS THE SYNDICATE, MR. DYNAMITE. AND WE'RE GOING AFTER THEM. WHAT DO YOU SAY?

I'M YOUR BOY MR. CAVANAUGH!



BY THE TIME I REACHED MY APARTMENT I WAS FEELING BETTER. BECAUSE MILLIONS AND THE POWER OF MILLIONS WERE ON MY SIDE.



MAYBE IT GAVE ME A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY. ANYWAY, I DIDN'T NOTICE WHAT WAS GOING ON BEHIND ME... UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE...

THIS TIME I KNEW IT
WAS NO GAME! THOSE
BOYS WERE PLAYING
FOR KEEPS!



THE SLUG MISSED ME BY INCHES. I KNEW THE
NEXT ONE COULDN'T. I WRESTLED FREE, AND
FINGERED THE FIRST OBJECT MY HANDS CAME
IN CONTACT WITH.



#!@#! I CAN'T SEE!

MAYBE YOU CAN'T, PAL.
BUT I CAN HEAR YOU!



I OPENED UP WITH THE 45, FIRING BLINDLY
INTO THE DARKNESS.



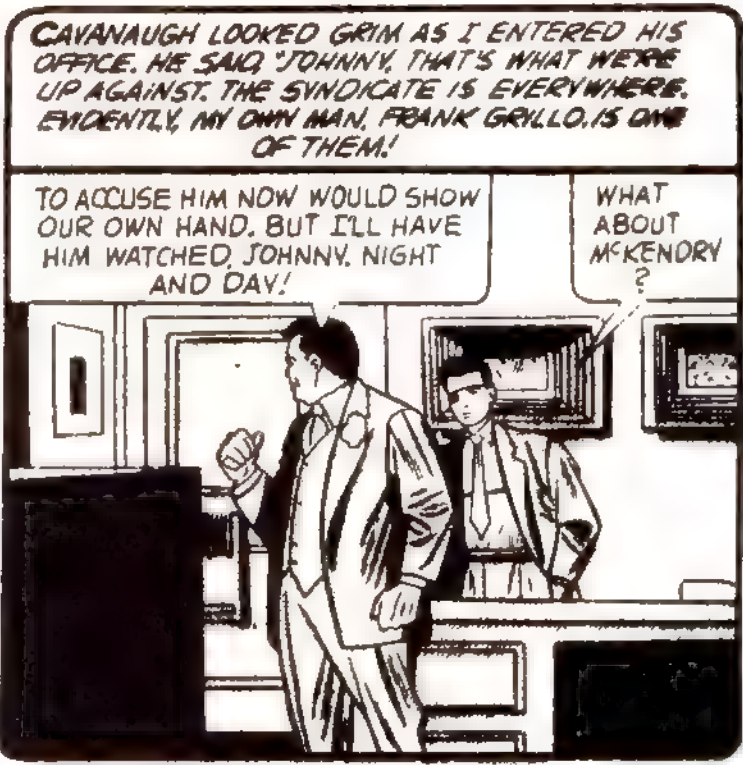
THE HEAVY BREATHING FROM BEHIND TOLD ME TO
LOOK OUT FOR TROUBLE. I TURNED JUST IN TIME.



I'D OF HAD HIM, TOO, BUT THE CLOTH OF HIS SHIRT
GAVE WAY...



#!@#! SHILLS!



I'LL BET MY EVERY DOLLAR ON MCKENDRY'S HONESTY. HE ALL HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE. YOU'LL HAVE TO BE SHARP, JOHNNY. YOU'RE ON THE SPOT NOW.

YEAH, CUTE. THEY KNOW ME, WHILE I'M STILL IN THE DARK. OKAY, THEN, I'LL REPORT WHAT I FIND... LATER.

OUTSIDE CAVANAUGH'S OFFICE I FOUND CAVANAUGH'S SECRETARY. THIS TIME HER SMILE SEEMED REAL. I SAID...

I KNOW A QUIET LITTLE RESTAURANT NOT FAR FROM HERE, PRINCESS. THEY SAY THE FOOD IS TERRIFIC. INTERESTED?

HMMM. WELL I SHOULDN'T SHOULD I, BUT I'D LOVE IT!

HER NAME WAS LAURIE PEARSON AND SHE SEEMED TO GROW ON ME. BEFORE I KNEW IT, I WANTED TO TELL HER MY LIVES HISTORY. BUT INSTEAD I ASKED...

WHY THE STARTLED LOOK, LAURIE, WHEN I SHOWED YOU THAT PIECE OF CLOTH?

IT... WAS NOTHING, REALLY. I... KNOW FRANK GRILLO IS MR. CAVANAUGH'S BODYGUARD. IN HIS HUGE OPERATIONS HE'S NEVER ACTUALLY SAFE, YOU KNOW. AND I MERELY REALIZED HOW TOUGH GRILLO IS.

LAURIE'S SOPHISTICATED VENEER SEEMED TO BE A SHIELD. BECAUSE, BENEATH IT, I COULD SENSE HER WARMTH. I THOUGHT, 'SHE WOULD BE NICE TO KISS.' I SAID...

I'D ASK YOU FOR A DATE LAURIE, BUT IT'S KIND OF DANGEROUS FOR ANYONE TO BE AROUND ME... NOW!

WHY NOT CALL AT MY APARTMENT, JOHNNY?

I WENT TO LAURIE'S APARTMENT THAT NIGHT, TELLING MYSELF SHE MIGHT KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT GRILLO. BUT WHEN I SAW HER, I FORGOT!

BABY!

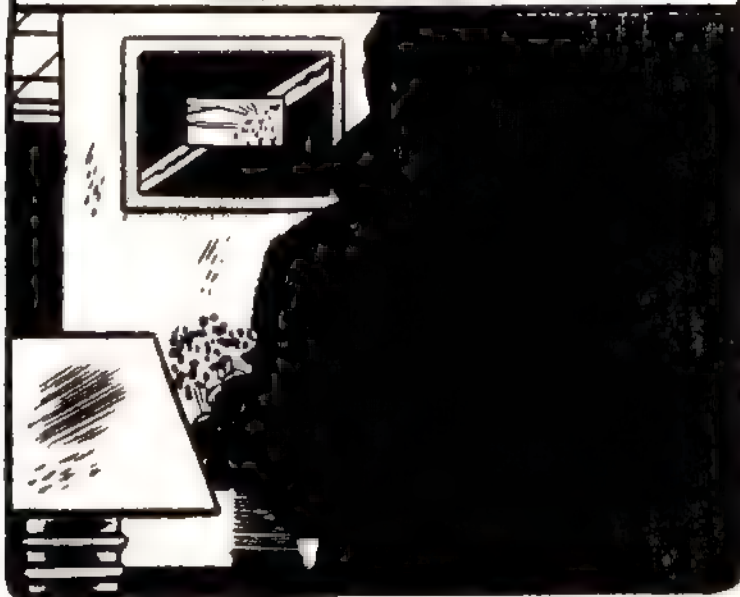
I'M GLAD YOU CAME, JOHNNY. I WAS AFRAID YOU WOULDN'T.

SHE MEANT WHAT SHE SAID, I COULD TELL THAT. AND IT WAS ENOUGH FOR ME. I PULLED HER TOWARD ME. I SAID...

COME HERE, LAURIE. I'VE BEEN MEANING TO DO THIS SINCE WE MET.

THEN DO IT, JOHNNY. I SHANT MIND.

HER LIPS WERE SOFT AND WILLING. SUDDENLY I DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW ANYTHING, BUT THAT SHE AND I WERE TOGETHER, SHUT OUT FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD.



THERE WAS NO THOUGHT OF TIME. ONLY LAURIE'S SOFT SOBBING BROUGHT ME OUT OF MY TRANCE. WHEN THE DAWN WAS GREY AGAINST THE WINDOWS.

WHY THE TEARS, LAURIE? WHAT GOES?

OH, JOHNNY, YOU'RE IN TERRIBLE DANGER! I FEEL IT! I KNOW IT! GO AWAY, JOHNNY!



I'M IN DANGER, TOO, JOHNNY! I KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT MR. CAVANAUGH'S BUSINESS! WHEN **THEY** LEARN ABOUT THE REFORM PARTY, THEY'LL TRY TO MAKE ME TALK! GRILLO WILL TELL THEM!

TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW, AND MAYBE I CAN HELP.



IT'S NOTHING DEFINITE, AND IT'S EVERYTHING! OH, JOHNNY, GO AWAY! NOW! AND TAKE ME WITH YOU!

NO CAN DO, LAURIE. I'VE GOT A JOB TO FINISH! BUT I'LL SEE THAT YOU'RE TAKEN AWAY UNDER GUARD, WHERE YOU'LL BE SAFE.



COME BACK TOMORROW EVENING, JOHNNY. HERE IS A KEY TO THE APARTMENT. IF I'M NOT HERE WHEN YOU ARRIVE, WAIT FOR ME. JOHNNY, I HAVE ALL THE EVIDENCE YOU NEED TO SOLVE YOUR CASE, BUT PROMISE THAT YOU'LL TAKE ME AWAY! PLEASE!

IT'S A PROMISE, BABY!



I WAS A RAT AND I KNEW IT. I HAD MADE LOVE TO LAURIE, BUT THE PART OF ME THAT WAS PRIVATE EYE STILL MADE ME SUSPICIOUS. I COULDN'T SLEEP WHEN I GOT HOME.

WHY DOES LAURIE ASK ME TO TAKE HER AWAY? WHY DID SHE **REALLY** GIVE ME HER KEY? WHY? WHY? WHY?

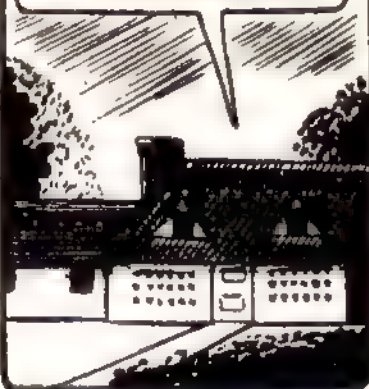


THE MORE I KICKED THE IDEA AROUND THE MORE IT POSSESSED ME. AND FINALLY, HATING MYSELF, I PHONED CAVANAUGH. I ARRANGED TO MEET HIM AT HIS TOWN HOUSE ON THE DRIVE.



I WENT AT ONCE TO CAVANAUGH'S HOUSE AND FOUND HIM WAITING FOR ME...

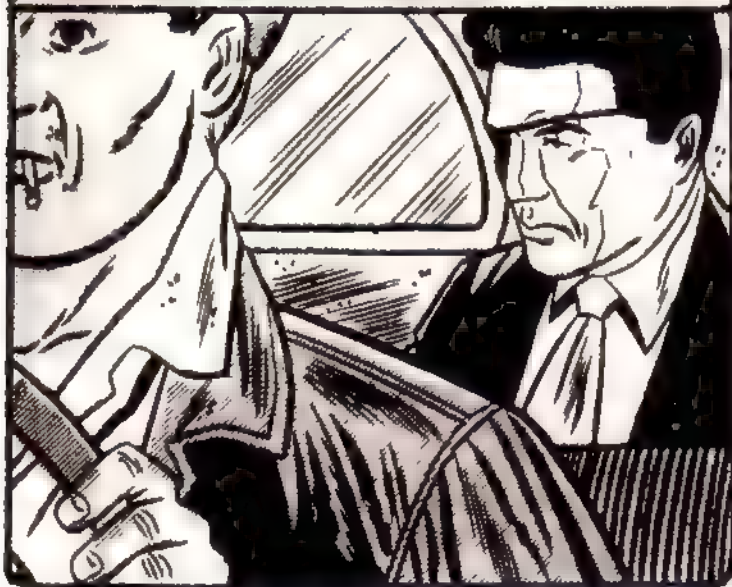
LAUREN PEARSON WANTS TO TELL ME A LOT, TONIGHT. WHAT DOES SHE KNOW? COULD SHE BE THE LEAK THAT'S BEEN WARNING THE SYNDKATE?



ABSOLUTELY NOT, JOHNNY. SHE KNOWS MORE DETAILS OF MY BUSINESS THAN I DO. SHE MAY HAVE INFORMATION THAT WILL HELP YOU! SHE'S KEEN. THINGS SHE'S SEEN OR HEARD MAY BE JUST THE INFORMATION YOU NEED TO GET YOUR INVESTIGATION GOING.



I FELT BETTER... A LOT BETTER. I ALSO FELT ASHAMED FOR DISTRUSTING LAURIE. I HOPPED A CAB TO HER PLACE. THINGS WOULD BE DIFFERENT NOW. I'D PLAY IT SQUARE.



AS I WALKED TOWARD LAURIE'S APARTMENT DOOR, I HEARD A SCREAM, CUT OFF AS IF IT HAD BEEN MUFFLED. JAMMING THE KEY HOME, I BARGED IN...



SHAMUS! GLAD YA CAME! SAVED CHASIN' AFTER YA!

OWWWW! YA #!@☆!!

I'M GONNA KILL YOU, GRILLO! THE HARD WAY! I'M GONNA KILL YOU WITH MY BARE HANDS!!



HATE SEEMED TO FILL MY BODY. THERE WAS NO THOUGHT OR REASON BEHIND MY MOVEMENTS, THEN... ONLY THE LUST TO KILL GRILLO!

Y-YOU'RE CRAZY... KEEP AWAY
"JEEZ GIMME A BREAK!!



HE SCREAMED AND BEGGED FOR MERCY. "GIMME A BREAK," HE CRIED YEAH... HE'D GET A BREAK. I BENT HIS HEAD BACK UNTIL...

GURR

OH...JOHNNY. H-HOLD ME IN YOUR... ARMS... PLEASE...

TAKE IT SLOW, LAURIE... I'VE GOT YOU...

I'M NOT A GOOD GIRL, JOHNNY. I GOT WHERE I DID WITH CAVANAUGH FOR **NOT** BEING GOOD! BUT, JOHNNY, I DON'T WANT TO DIE! DEATH IS SO LONELY! AND I'VE BEEN LONELY ALL MY LIFE, UNTIL YOU...

THERE'S A PAPER IN MY OTHER HAND, JOHNNY. IT HAS THE COMBINATION TO THE WALL SAFE IN CAVANAUGH'S OFFICE! ALL...YOU NEED KNOW.....!

OH, GOD! LAURIE! LAURIE!

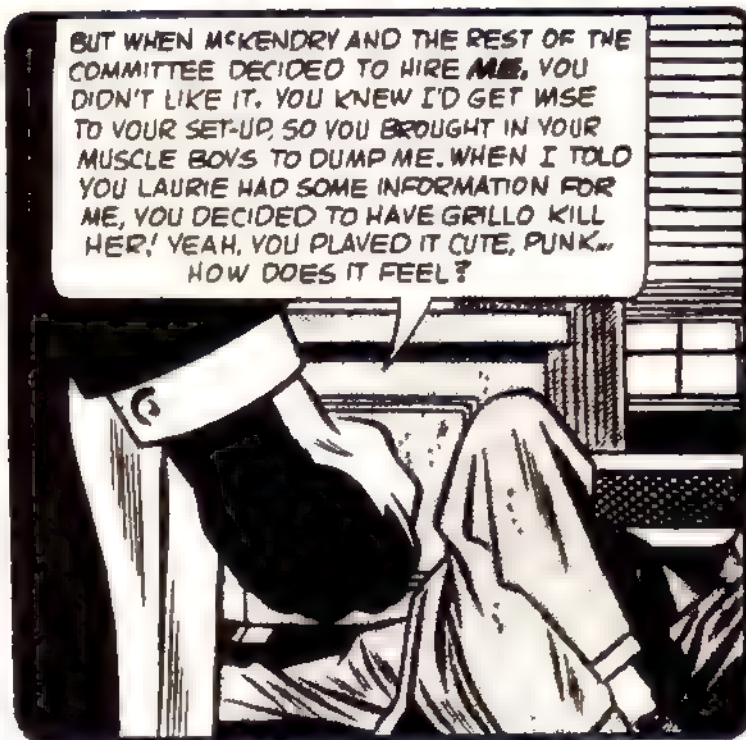
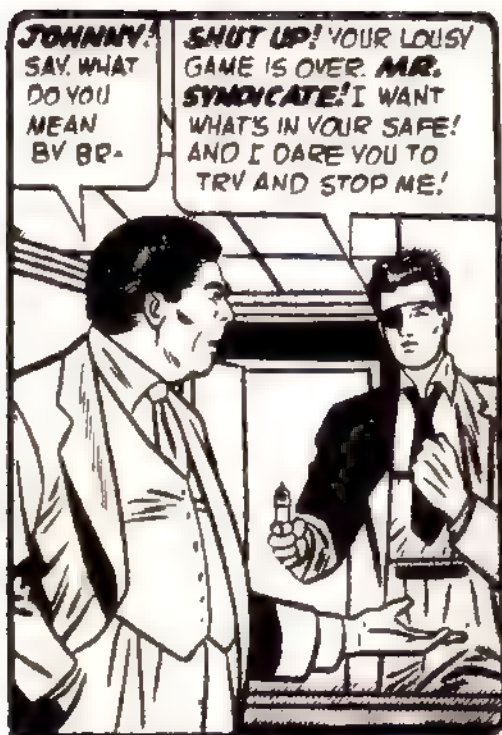
DEAD...DEAD! AND I DID IT! WITH... MY DIRTY, EVIL, SUSPICIOUS MIND AND MY BIG MOUTH!

I KISSED LAURIE AND TOOK THE CRUMPLED PAPER FROM HER HAND. THERE WASN'T MUCH ELSE TO DO, NOW. EXCEPT GET THE BOSS OF THE SYNDICATE... **AND WATCH HIM DIE!!**

I HUSTLED OVER TO CAVANAUGH'S OFFICE AND BARGED PAST THE RECEPTIONIST'S DESK.

JUST A MINUTE MR. DYNAMITE.

I'LL STOP BY ON MY WAY OUT.





Address all letters of
comment to:

SWAK

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52761

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dear Max,

Just a note to let you and Terry and Barb know how much I like MS. TREE. I've come to the book rather late (the beginning of '87), but I'm hooked now. No big surprise, I guess, since the major influences on the character—Mickey Spillane and Jack Webb (the TV Jack Webb, not the novelist, who isn't bad, either)—are favorites of mine as well as yours. And you can add Max Allan Collins to that list, as well.

As I said, I've just shown up here recently, and I'm missing a lot of background. A recent storyline (the murder of Ms. Tree's father) implies that our heroine's maiden name was Michael Friday. Has that ever been stated explicitly? Is the existence of a minor Spillane character named Michael Friday a nifty coincidence, or did you do it on purpose?

For a while, I was up and down on Terry's art. I found it a little jarring at first. It isn't pretty. Most comic book art these days is very pretty. On the other hand, it works. It moves the stories along, and what more can you ask? It has even occurred to me that Terry is matching your hardboiled stories with hardboiled art. I can believe these characters have spent the afternoon rolling around back alleys dodging bullets. No matter how ripped and bloody Nick Fury ever got, he always seemed as if an asprin and a shower would put him in shape to run a marathon before dinner.

One thing I've never been ambivalent about is Michael herself. She is always gorgeous and sexy without being comic-book beautiful. From the don't-mess-with-me-glare to the hairstyle, to the (estimated) fifteen or so pounds Michael carries around that a woman's magazine would urge her to lose, Terry has done a masterful job of making the heroine of made up adventures seem very real indeed.

My only complaint is the same as everyone else's. I wish there were more pages. When we talked at Bouchercon, I suggested doing a graphic novel or two each year instead of regular publication. This would cost us the best letter column in comics, but it would let the twelve page installments pile up to the point where they'd be a real feast. Would going straight black and white save enough to make another page or two an issue feasible? I like the two-color approach but I think it would be an acceptable trade-off for more story.

Or (speaking of more story) have you considered doing Ms. Tree in prose? She is a character deep enough and rich enough

and complex enough to support a novel, or any number of short stories. Forgive me if I'm acting pushy—I know that the more work you have to do already, the more ideas people have for you. These are just things you might think about in the unlikely event you have an idle moment.

I must confess that Johnny Dynamite doesn't blow me away. (Ha ha). Seriously though, doesn't anybody ever say anything about his name? "Dynamite?! Your name is Johnny Dynamite?!?" How the hell much did that cost? It sort of puts a crimp in the old suspension of disbelief. Aside from that, I find the stories pretty run of the mill for the era.

I do, however, admire Monni's having had the hair to make the guy look exactly like John Garfield. I mean, once C.C. Beck says Captain Marvel is based on Fred MacMurray, or Gil Kane points out he based the Atom on Robert Taylor, you can see the resemblance. But my God, people who have never heard of John Garfield could recognize him in Johnny Dynamite ("Dynamite, huh? Your father must have been a blast in bed.") Okay, Okay, I'll stop.

Anyway, keep up the good work, with Ms. Tree and with Heller, Quarry, Mallory, Ness, Tracy and the rest. Hope to see you in New York this spring at the Crime Writers' Congress.

Best,
William L. DeAndrea

We're delighted and honored to have this letter from two-time Edgar winner Bill DeAndrea, one of the best and classiest mystery writers of this day or any other. Bill is published by Mysterious Press (among others) and his name is a virtual quality guarantee where your mystery-buying dollar is concerned. To respond to some of Bill's questions...yes, we've stated that Ms. Tree's maiden name was Friday, and she was indeed specifically named after Michael Friday, a minor character in Mickey Spillane's KISS ME, DEADLY. Later in this column I'll discuss the graphic novel notion at some length, but as for a prose MS. TREE novel, that remains a possibility, when time allows - and there have been two MS. TREE short stories to date (in FILES OF MS. TREE #1 and #2); one of these, "The Little Woman," was recently purchased for reprint in the second BLACK LIZARD crime anthology. As for Johnny Dynamite looking like John Garfield, I'm sure it's a coincidence...just like Ms. Tree having a cop father named Friday....

Dear Max, Terry, Deni, Barb, etc:

I thought I'd drop a line to let you know that MS. TREE #40, cover-dated June, went on sale here in Chicago today, on the date above. For a while there I thought that Renegade had gone out of business, or on strike, or something. As is my usual practice, I read SWAK first, and I was again shocked by the sheer bile expressed by your more contentious readers. It seems as if Fantagraphics had subcontracted to do the letter page. Anyway, I feel that more than enough venom has passed on both sides, and it is past time to address the real problem with MS. TREE, the late, late, and getting even later deliveries. I mean, guys, missing a month here and there is par for the course with independent comics, but the whole summer? #40 was

beaten to the stands by two issues of SECRET INVASION and on of WORDSMITH, a bi-monthly and a quarterly respectively, and MS. TREE is putatively a monthly. Lord knows I don't want to be one with the Whiner's Club, but you all must admit that something is really out of whack when every comics newsmagazine is carrying full-page ads heralding "Coming of Rage," which by now should be on its third issue, while the rest of us are waiting for the conclusion of "Like Father." This is NOT a complaint; it is an expression of concern. All these missed months may have led many readers to assume that you've either suspended publication or shut down shop altogether. If memory serves, this was the reason you left Eclipse, or one of them, anyway. Presumably, all the overdue issues are in house (otherwise how could Renegade prepare the ads?),

so what's the answer? NOT a complaint, NOT a threat, just the concern of a faithful reader.

You'll note that throughout the foregoing, I have not dealt with Max's overcommitting himself (the John Carradine Challenge Cup for accepting every job offer), or Terry's ideas of diplomacy (the Sam Kinison Fellowship) or any personal mention of Deni (a videocassette of THE MONKEY PIT programmed to automatically fast-forward to every scene in which a worker says the house will be ready in two weeks). Ad hominem has no place in this situation, no matter how much fun it is. All the fair-weather fans who claim to be dropping you can't have been very faithful to start with (please note the word "claim"; I have the sneaking suspicion that they'll each buy at least one more copy just to see their names in print one more time).

Any effort to catch up with the delayed issues will go farther to mend fences with the disaffected than anything else I can think of, and that's where Renegade's efforts should be directed. No problem or dispute is insoluble, if the disputants really want to solve it (ask Bob Overstreet). End of lecture.

Michael Doran
Hometown, IL

Michael, we're well aware of the problem with frequency of publication, and are striving to get back on track. On the other hand, we did deliver 10 issues of MS. TREE in 1987, albeit one of them was a 3-D Summer Special that was mostly non-MS. TREE reprint material, and the final one of those '87 delivered issues didn't appear till mid-January of '88. We were not helped when our printer failed to heed Terry's instructions as to adjusting the cover dates, which made the problem seem even worse that it was. Yes, we've taken on a lot of work, in order to make a living. No, I don't take everything I'm offered...I turn down most of what I'm offered, and as everybody is sick of hearing, I quit BATMAN partially because of work overload. I wrote only two novels in 1987 - PRIMARY TARGET, already in print, and BUTCHER'S DOZEN, the second Eliot Ness novel, which will be out from Bantam as a paperback original in the latter half of '88. The new Heller, which is a February '88 hardcover release from St. Martin's, was written in '86. The notion that I am incredibly prolific is just that: a notion. Just as the notion that I never turn down an offer is a notion, and silly one at that. This week thus far I have turned down an offer to write a non-fiction book on Chicago crime, declined several speaking engagements, passed on doing a western short story for an anthology, and informed one of the top editors at the "big two" (who called with a mini series idea) that I would not be available for any comic book work other than MS. TREE and WILD DOG until '89 at the earliest...and it's only Wednesday. (But I did accept an offer to write an intro for one of the SILENT INVASION collections.)

Dear Max and Terry

First off I want to thank you for the autographed edition of the FILES OF MS. TREE VOL. III for submitting a correct answer to the Mike Mist Mystery.

To be perfectly honest, I'd rather have it than the first

prize, which was the original page of "Final Edit."

Don't get me wrong! It's a great prize you have. But you see, I am an aspiring artist myself. I have artwork all over my studio. If I want artwork, I just do it myself. For the past year and a half, I have been developing my own superhero. Which I hope the powers that be will honor me with publishing. I've just finished my first novel as well, and it is ready to go out in search of a publisher.

Now to the reason for this letter. All of the above was simply to set the stage for what is to follow. So that if this letter should see print, that those reading it will be aware of that which I speak.

I read all the letters in issue #40. Something I rarely do. Plus Terry's comments.

Truly, \$2 may seem a lot for a comic book to some, but not if the contents are exceptional. You pay more than that each month for a newspaper, and you throw that away. There are books out there now that cost a lot less that I wouldn't keep if you gave them to me. Well written and drawn books will only increase in value as time goes on. Just last week I saw someone shell out 18 bucks for the first issue of G.I. JOE.

How many readers out there smoke? You think nothing of parting with a buck and a half a day of your so called "hard earned money." And for what!? Trashed lungs! You tell me which is the better value. Of course there are those who smoke something a little stronger, and are paying \$60 an ounce, or thereabouts. But then I doubt that too many of them are comics fans. Easy Rider would be more like it.

Anyway, Terry. I know what it's like to sweat bullets over an art table. No matter how good a job you do, you never truly like what you've put to paper. I know! I feel that way sometimes. After you've turned it in, you still wonder if you couldn't have done better. I've redone a whole day's work because I didn't like it. Even though everyone around me did.

An artist has to try and tell the story so that words are needed only in the smallest detail. Facial expressions are uppermost in this medium. And I think you've pulled it off well.

As for John Bilmes' letter in issue #40, and to all those out there yelling, YAY! RIGHT ON! YOU TELL 'IM, JOSHI!, but didn't have the guts to write in yourself. All I can say is, go back to watching your Saturday morning cartoon shows. They're geared to people like you who don't like to think.

I enjoy the Johnny Dynamite series. The dialogue may not be modern, but the artwork is very good. The facial expressions, and composition are well above par.

And if Joshua is listening. I had the answer to the latest Johnny Dynamite story before I was half way through it. The clues are there pal. They're probably just too subtle for you.

All I can say in closing, Terry, is that your comments do sound like bitching. But all us artists are somewhat off center anyway. I'm not as thin skinned as some of the readership seems to be. I just ignore it.

I'll make you a bet though. I'll bet that all those nimbulbs out there will not stop buying Ms Tree, because they like being insulted by you, and will not want to miss an issue in case you do it again.

Victor J. Miller
Somerdale, NJ

Hi, Max, Terry and Gary;

It just occurred to me that MS. TREE has consistently been one of my top five favorite funnybooks over the last half decade or so and I've never written to thank you for the entertainment.

Thanx for all the entertainment.

Now, if I can nose my pennies worth of opinion in on your latest raging non-issue controversy, the page count issue...

I have no pity for those snobs who can't enjoy a comic unless it's four color, but I find I can sympathize with comics aficionados on limited budgets, since I was there myself once. But the cost of comic collecting surely has more to do with the ever increasing cost of printing, paper and nickel hot dogs than with Terry Beatty's need to make BMW payments.

To be honest (and I'm getting the impression that you don't care, but...) I've only read Johnny Dynamite a couple times. It's interesting to see how Morisi's style influenced Terry's artistic development (much the same way Ditko influenced Kato or those Lone Wolf and Cub guys influenced Miller), but it's not what I buy Ms. Tree for.

However, by my standards, a comic book is a comic book regardless of length or format, and even a single chapter of Ms. Tree makes for a damn fine read.

Some of your "grippers" seem to be under the impression that MS. TREE is the only comic "coming up short," which is hardly the case.

Let's look at some figures. I buy Strange Tales for the 11 page Dr. Strange story--at 75 cents that's 6.8 cents a page. A 16 page Miracleman story costs 7.8 cents per page, a page of Badger is 8.7 cents. If like me your only incentive to purchase 200AD Presents is the Alan Davis artwork and you don't read the rest of the comic, then the cost of the Davis material is 13.9 cents per page.

Now compare those numbers to MS. TREE #40 (which didn't contain a new Mike Mist strip.) Twelve pages of "Ms. Tree," only two bucks, scarcely 16.666...cents a page. Less than a dime a page more than the Marvel product. And that's not counting the 7 text pages, including 5 pages of the best letters column in comics today.

And Puh-lease don't remind me that I forgot to count the cover. That's part of the definition of what a comic book is. You buy a comic, you get a cover.

Hey, guys, I'm on your side, really. But the figures don't lie. You are unquestionably putting out one of the most expensive comics on the market. As a fan I have to add, unquestionably one of the best. But as a retailer I have to add, you're not making it very easy for me to persuade new readers to sample your work. (And I hate to break this to you but judging from customer reactions at the comics shop where I work, The Book Stop, I don't think your work at DC is winning you many new fans. Max, if you really don't like superhero comics, maybe you shouldn't try writing them.)

Personally, I prefer the "Files Of Ms. Tree" format. Considering the current success of the graphic novel and trade paperback formats, and since Renegade is advertising the upcoming four-issue Ms. Tree serial as a "graphic novel," maybe the market might be ready to accept a once or twice a year MS.. Tree album in place of the comic book format. Of course, I'll continue to be a devoted MS.. Tree fan regardless of the format you present her in.

As long as Michael continues to share pages with Mist and Dynamite, I second the motion to change the title back to "MS.. Tree's Thrilling Detective Adventures." And I'd like to nominate tough-as-nails head-Pretender Chrissy Hynde for the lead role in MS.. Tree: The Movie.

Randy H. Crawford,
Grand Rapids MI

Randy,

If you even remotely think Terry Beatty can afford to drive a BMW, you're crazier than MS.. TREE herself. The crisis around the Beatty place last week was trying to figure out how to come up with the cash to replace a tire that blew due to the extreme winter cold - a tire on his little red, several year-old Chevette. And I don't think Pete Morisi had much effect on Terry's artistic development...he didn't discover Johnny Dynamite till a couple years back. Hey, Randy - the cover counts, too; it doesn't get drawn by Ouija board, after all. I agree that the major problem with the current format is that it hampers growth...loyal readers are sticking with us, but expansion is difficult if not impossible. As for me hating superhero comics, that simply isn't the case...I grew up on 'em, and primarily am annoyed by what passes for super-hero comics these days, and bored by ponderous, pompous, over-serious handling of a fun if inherently adolescent form. WILD DOG sales figures were such that we were offered a slot in ACTION WEEKLY (given a choice between that and a monthly book or a maxi-series, actually), so somebody out there thinks I can do superhero comics.

Max and Terry

Adding unneeded fuel to the fire of the current MS. TREE "content controversy" was the very late appearance of issue #40. It's unfortunate enough that Ms. Tree fans only get 12 pages of our favorite female P.I. each issue, but when those issues come sporadically of late, it gets downright hard to remember the intricacies of Max's continued storylines. And that's to the detriment of the book in general. I'm sure there are good reasons why the book has been late lately. But I wonder if this latest problem only makes more logical one solution: graphic novels.

Graphic novels allow Ms. Tree fans uninterrupted stories. They allow Max to be read in the environment in which his writing really shines, as the earlier compilations of Tree stories prove. They allow Terry to stretch his time frame to avoid feeling like he's always watching the clock as he works.

I'm sure there are problems to be solved. I recognize that Terry in particular relies on Ms. Tree for his daily bread, and semi-annual publication wouldn't pay the bills....or would it? I see Tree graphic novels as pricey volumes on good crisp paper. They would be carried through book stores, and hopefully widen your audience while not losing any of your current readers (who would , I suspect, pay well for a 48-64 page new adventure of Tree in this permanent, attractive format). It appears to this outsider that there are no real negatives to this approach, and I do feel that Ms. Tree, with the current content problems, may be proving herself to be outgrowing the monthly comic

book medium. I'd love both of your thoughts on this.

On to other matters.....As a longtime Pete Morisi and Johnny Dynamite fan, I am horrified to hear you (and he) are enduring negative feedback to the reprinting of his work. I can understand why some readers would not enjoy his Spillane-like grittiness and the '50s-era storylines, but surely there is a recognizable talent at work here, and that talent demands reader respect. The irony is that Max has done such a good job writing Ms. Tree that many writers may be unaware of just how unusual Dynamite was, compared to any of its '50s genre competitors. The strip shines in particular when compared to the flood of '50s cops and robbers comics, and can be favorably compared to the adult storytelling of EC's CRIME SUSPENSESTORIES. Even today, Dynamite should still be appreciated for its adult themes, sharp writing, and the absolutely unique artistic vision of Mr. Morisi. There's really something worth looking into here, gang!

I feel what may really be happening here is that Mr. Morisi is the unfair recipient of Ms. Tree fans' ire that her adventures have been truncated of late - of necessity, but no less frustrating for whatever reason. Perhaps Johnny Dynamite reprints would also do better in graphic novel form.

Certainly it appears you and Ms. Tree are approaching a publishing crossroads, and as a fan from day one, I hope the current crisis can be solved to the satisfaction of both her creators and her readers.

Terry, you are needlessly apologetic in #40's letter column. Let those who misread your comments fall by the wayside as they deserve to do. You need not apologize for your heartfelt feelings about MS. TREE, Johnny Dynamite, or your work as a whole.

Jeff Gelb
Redondo Beach, CA

Jeff,

Thanks for your defense of Pete Morisi and Johnny Dynamite, although of late more and more favorable reactions to the classic duo are coming in. As for graphic novels, the basic approach has been for us to use the monthly comic book as a place for graphic novels to gradually appear...in other words, it's no new step, going into graphic novels, as that's what we've been doing all along. Going directly to a graphic novel format cuts out the "daily" income provided by these serializations. If the Paperjacks reprint books are successful, then this theory, this plan, will finally pan out. Also, frankly, it's not up to us: It's up to some publisher to approach us and express an interest, a willingness, to do MS. TREE graphic novels in, say, a slick full-color format, with a page rate and royalty schedule that would make it feasible. We were approached by a number of companies, besides Paperjacks, about collecting MS. TREE in book form - and judging by the offers, we could not have afforded to produce original MS. TREE material at that rate...only as reprint collection.

Dear Max and Terry,

The good news is that the change in format hasn't weakened the quality of the stories at all. The conclusion of "Like Father" was every bit as well planned as MS.. Tree's previous adventures. It really has to be borne in mind that what each issue contains is (usually) just one chapter of a

greater whole, but knowing this, MS.. TREE remains one of the best comics around. Sure, as I've said before, I'd prefer more pages of MS.. Tree herself each month, but I'm happy with what there is. (Hell, I'd prefer a full colour MS.. TREE graphic novel every week, you listening, Terry?!) I would guess that this will lay Michael's father's ghost to rest for a while. It would be good to see her sister as at least an occasional guest star. Will you get back to a few more social issues? "Coming of Rage" looks more like a personal story, which is fine also.

Back in the ever eloquent letters page, I was surprised how many people took offence at Terry's column. Hell, this is just an artist taking advantage of the forum to address a few remarks he's heard, and I don't exactly see buying this comic as feeding anybody's ego trip--or at least, no more than that applies to buying any comic. One thing I would disagree with Terry on is our right to criticize the J.D.strip, which surely comes along with our right to criticize the MS.. Tree strip? I presume that Johnny's adventures would appeal to many MS.. Tree fans, but again most of us would prefer MS.. Tree herself, and also, some of us may have criticisMS. of Pete Morisi. My own personal taste, even if the artists were doing each other's strips, would be to prefer seeing Terry's art.

Finally, any news on whether or not WILD DOG will continue, or what other projects you might have lined up? And how will this affect the format of MS.. TREE?

Malcolm Bourne,
London, England

I am committed to writing three novels this year, Malcom - two of them about Eliot Ness, and the other a non-Nate Heller historical suspense novel about RFK and Hoffa. As you probably already know, WILD DOG will be one of the recurring features in ACTION WEEKLY. How long we'll keep that up depends on the feature's popularity, and the stamina of Collins/Beatty. I just signed a new five-year contract to continue scripting DICK TRACY for Tribune Media Services. Also, I'm writing some songs for my band, Crusin', which we hope to record this year: several records are in the offing, with several of the projects having a MS.. TREE tie-in. More about that, later.

Dear Max,

I'm sure I don't know what the heck everyone's complaining about; the letter column of MS.. Tree alone was worth two bucks. As a matter of fact, I felt so guilty about getting the whole package so cheap that I felt compelled to enclose two bucks to ease my conscience. Maybe you can take Terry out for a burger.

Lou Bear, Davis, CA

Lou isn't kidding: he really did send us two bucks; and we (Collins and Beatty) really did split it, and spend it, each in his own way. Sorry, Gary!

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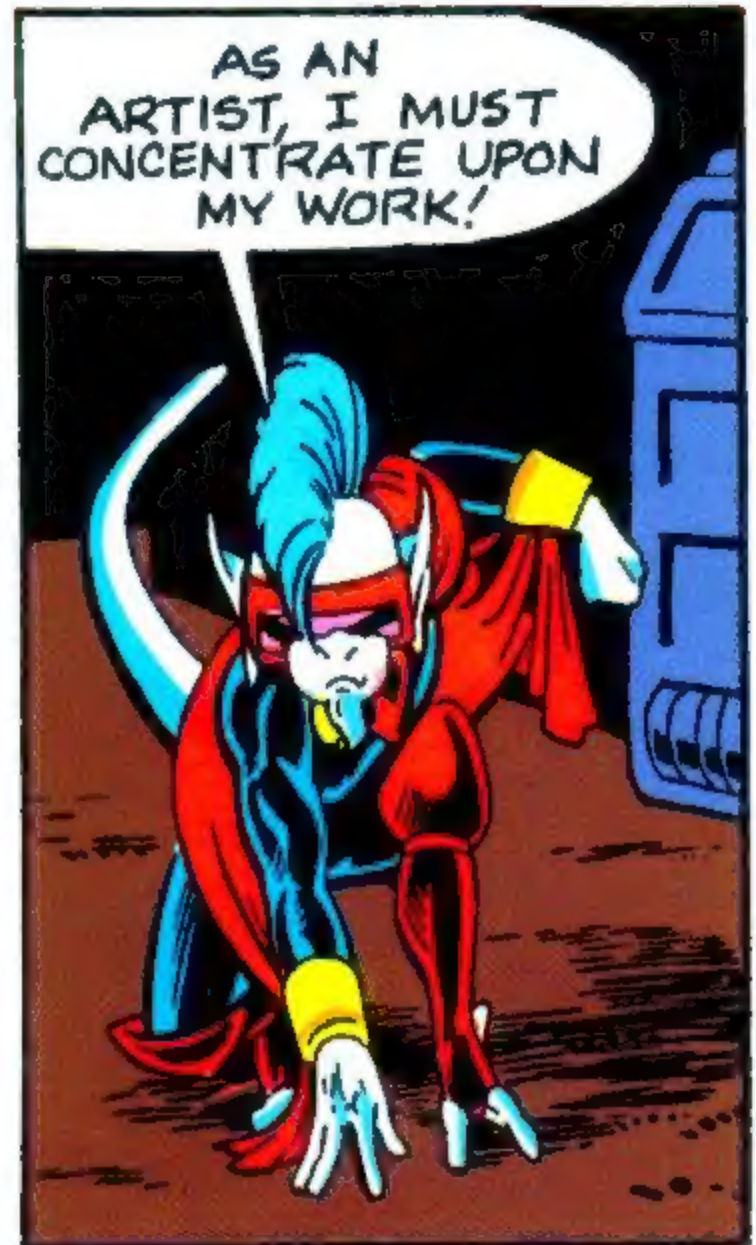
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